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Managing Digital Content for a Professional Sport Team: An Interview With Bill Yole, Social Media Coordinator and Webmaster of the ACT Brumbies Super Rugby Franchise

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Bill Yole is the social media coordinator and webmaster for the ACT Brumbies Super Rugby team. This interview covers Yole's role with the club, including the day-to-day social media operations at the Brumbies and how content creation is key to the engagement of fans locally and internationally. This is particularly vital to Yole's role because of the Brumbies' international exposure through competing in Super Rugby, which is played in seven nations, and the number of representative players in national teams alongside several of the Brumbies players' having heritage in the Pacific Islands. Yole also discusses how he took advantage of opportunities during his studies to secure full-time employment after he completed his sports media degree at the University of Canberra.

Authors: What is your role and what do you do on a day-to-day basis?

Yole: I am the social media coordinator and webmaster. Maintaining and running the website is a big part of my day-to-day work. This involves making sure the information is up-to-date on every page, ensuring that there are no errors anywhere, like in pages or contact forms. And I also run the day-to-day management of our social media accounts, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. That includes responding to questions on social media, pushing out sponsorship and news content, taking photos of events, and compiling albums. I write a lot of the news content that appears on the Brumbies website as well. Essentially, everything that goes on the social media account and website is my responsibility.

Authors: Given that sporting activities and social media peak times often occur outside of office hours, how do you find yourself organizing your work week?

Yole: During the season, it is definitely a seven-day week. You have to always be on your phone checking social media accounts and e-mail at least every couple of hours. On game weekends, you will get questions all the time about things that are going on at the game. You have to be on top of that. Game day is a whole different beast. You have to be there 3 to 4 hours before the game starts, making sure everything is all set up, preparing your computer, telling people how long until gates are open, taking photos around the precinct. During the game, there is live Twitter and Facebook updates. We also have an app to update. That is hectic! We try to get an update once every two minutes during the game, so it is constant typing and copying things across different windows and then the app. After the game, our post-match media is a big thing. [For example, we upload] a match report. If we have an intern, they usually write this, but if not, it is up to me. Then we create a photo album of the game. We have a partnership with Getty Images, which sends a photographer to every Super Rugby game. We get those images and resize them so that they are not too big and [don't] overload the website and social media accounts. There are also some other post-match media tasks to do. So if the game finishes at 9 p.m., I won't get out of the stadium until 11:30 p.m. or midnight.

Authors: You were talking before about all the different social media content. Is that planned in some way? Or is it more ad hoc with whatever pops up or looks attractive?

Yole: There is a bit of both. There is content that you have every week, like our Throwback Thursday posts that have recently been sponsored by Canberra Milk. We started in October last year doing Throwback Thursdays with the view of getting it sponsored, and so it is another way for the team to make money, and that has happened now. It is not a set time

every Thursday, but every Thursday we will do that. During the season, every Friday there would be a match preview that I would write, and every Wednesday we did a head-to-head for the upcoming game (stats comparing a Brumbies player against a player on the opposition team); and every Tuesday we did a star of the week. But it is not set that you have to do it at the same time each week. We have to be flexible, because there are a lot of other factors that could come up during a day or week, such as a news story. For example, if we set the star of the week to midday on a Tuesday every week, but SANZAAR [South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Argentina Rugby, which is the governing body for Super Rugby] send us a media release saying one of our players is suspended, then we need to be flexible and work our activities around that. So there is a lot of planning but also flexibility built in because things pop up at a moment's notice.

Authors: What about the messaging around it? Is it strategically orientated?

Yole: Definitely. We have a media and communications meeting every week, and if there is specific messages that we want to get across and target, then we talk about that. For example, we were dealt a pretty bad game time for the home quarterfinal this season with a 6 p.m. kickoff on a Friday night, so we had to target the messaging. We created a social media campaign called "knock off for kick off," which was using [the] hashtag #knockoff4kickoff. Then, we engaged with local businesses to get them on board, as we publicly asked businesses to let their staff leave work early to attend the game. We also promoted businesses [that] got on board with our campaign on our website and on social media to create some additional interest in the #knockoff4kickoff campaign. This campaign received some mainstream media attention in the local newspaper and news stories on television.

Authors: With so many different platforms, how do you ensure your branding and messaging is consistent?

Yole: It is all run by me, so I can make it pretty consistent. There is no cross communication, because there is only the one person, who is in charge of everything, which is how we get consistency and [don't] get mixed messages. For example, every single department in the organization needs to maintain its content on the website. It would be easy to give them all access, but we want consistent messaging and a consistent look and feel, so that is why I do it all. I am like a middleman: if someone wants something on the web, they communicate it to me and I can put what they want up, but I can also make it consistent with the rest of our messaging and the rest of our look and feel.

Authors: How do you decide what content goes on each platform? How do you decide if something is more suited to Facebook or Twitter, for example, or is it all the same?

Yole: No, it is not all the same. But I think this is something that I struggled with when I first started. I think I put everything on everything. As I have gone through, it has changed. Facebook is for pretty much everything; all of our content will always go on Facebook because of its diversity. But in terms of a news story we want to share, then that is a Twitter and Facebook thing. We won't put that on Instagram because you cannot link on Instagram, and there is no point putting a picture of lots and lots of text, which is what a news story often is, on Instagram. But if we find a cool photo or if someone takes a cool photo at a game or of the boys outside training or doing something outside of football, then that is something we put on Instagram and Facebook rather than on Twitter. I feel like more people are on Twitter for news; on Instagram, you are just scrolling down looking for cool things to look at, so we try to find more aesthetically pleasing images. We put everything on Facebook. You can have posts with paragraphs, and it doesn't look too bad, or you can have a photo with one line and a few emojis in it.

Authors: What does the social media aspect add to the game day experience both for the non-attendees and attendees?

Yole: Sometimes it is hard to say for attendees because of the Internet in the stadium being so bad, which makes it hard for them to get involved. But in terms of non-attendees, being as thorough and regular as we can be with our updates on Twitter and Facebook is really important for our fans. Sometimes we have fans overseas who do not have somewhere to watch the game, so they will follow it on Twitter. It is really good when you get comments about how much they are enjoying the coverage and updates. It is also a learning process, and I think the updates have gotten better as the season goes along. I wasn't posting as many score updates; people would say [they didn't] know what the score [was]. So little things you pick up and get better at. A lot of teams only post when their team scores or [when] a try is scored against their team, but we try to keep people updated every two minutes or so with everything happening.

Authors: The Brumbies have quite a number of players who play in representative teams such as the Australian national team, the Wallabies. How do you utilize them to bring attention back to the Brumbies?

Yole: We will repost their content from their own social media channels. We have a lot of guys who are very active on their social media accounts, and it is good to use their content and repost it. We always make it obvious that it is a repost and people can read it. If people don't follow those people on their accounts, then they can see that. For example, David Pocock is active on all of his social media accounts, so he is a great tool to use to bring people back to us. Tevita Kuridrani is great; he is really artistic with his social media posts, which surprises people. He takes really nice photos and enhances them with filters, which is useful when they are on tour and at events, when we can repost his content on the team's social media platforms. When they post, we can repost content and bring it back to the Brumbies. That is probably the best way we utilize them because it is kind of difficult to just go up to them and ask them to do this and do that. There are processes

we have to go through to get videos put up on our social media accounts of them doing work. They have pretty strict schedules, where they have to be doing strength and conditioning stuff at this time and resting during this time, so there is quite a process to get them to do things. If they post things off their own back, it is much easier to repost it and use it in that way.

Authors: The Brumbies play across multiple countries in Super Rugby. How important is it to have a worldwide social media following? How do you target fans outside of Canberra?

Yole: It is extremely important. Our general manager always tells me [that] one of the first things a potential sponsor asks about is our social media reach. So we put a big focus on it, and I think that is why my role was created: the Brumbies wanted to expand its reach and followers. International followership is huge too. One of our biggest followings is in Fiji, and the Fijians are always posting on our platforms. In terms of targeting internationally, it is hard. We promote the occasional Facebook post, but it is hard to target specific areas like South Africa. It is unlikely that a South African company will come on board as a sponsor, but, of course, we want to engage our fans in South Africa. So when we are in South Africa, we will be posting about where we are and trying to keep [South Africans] engaged and encourage fans to come out and see the games. After the games, our players will meet Brumbies fans, take photos, and chat with them. With social media, our reach and likes (and other interactions) are very important for sponsors.

Authors: You mentioned fan engagement before. How do you interact with your followers? Is it one way communication where you post something and they comment and it stays there, or do you interact with the comments/commenters?

Yole: We try to respond to all the questions we get on social media. That has been a directive. A lot of the time you get personal messages, hundreds of messages, but we will respond to them. We try our very best to answer questions on Facebook, but sometimes you get something really inflammatory and you cannot really answer it; it is just really a loaded question. But we do our absolute best to monitor the comments and respond to questions. That is part of the engagement process, but you want to post engaging content and make people think, “Wow, I want to read this” or “Wow, I want to watch the video.” That was something that I also meant by engagement, not only having a conversation with fans over social media. Dealing with negative or trolling questions is difficult. Sometimes I will read a comment [that] is not very nice, and you just have to take a deep breath before replying. If it is a really difficult comment and I am struggling with how to respond, I go to the media manager and ask how to respond to it to cover myself. If something is super abusive, we sometimes hide the comment or block the user; we do not need to respond to things like that because they are not reasonable, and there is no point in responding to unreasonable people.

Authors: Given everything you have told us so far, how do you measure your social media success?

Yole: For me, when I first started, success was to increase followers. When I first started, we had about 98,000 likes on Facebook. We were third by a distance in the Australian conference of Super Rugby in terms of Facebook followers—we'll be behind both the Waratahs [which play in Sydney] and the Reds [which play in Brisbane]. Now we are up to 155,000, and only 5,000 behind the Waratahs and 25,000 behind the Reds. On Twitter, we are about 1,000 behind the Waratahs. On Instagram, when I first started, we had 18,000 followers; now we are number one in Australia and number three in Super Rugby in total, with about 68,000 followers. So things like that is a part of how I measure success—those are the numbers that back you up. But also, I feel like I am creating a lot of engaging content. Writing is one of my biggest strengths and is what I was originally planning on doing: being a sportswriter or working in a related field. I feel like our content, in terms of writing and news articles, is the best in Super Rugby. All the other teams, what they put on their website for news articles and related news stories, are media releases with team announcements and things like that. We put on regular news, not just about what is going on here, but all Super Rugby and international rugby, player features, head-to-head articles, and I am really proud of the content creation that goes on here. That is part of the reason why I think I have been successful in the job, because our content creation is so good. And that also helps social media. If you are able to continually push out engaging content on social media [that drives] people to your website, then people will see that the Brumbies are always posting these interesting or engaging articles with everything to help keep up-to-date in Super Rugby, they are much more likely to follow you and be engaged with your social media. Content creation is huge, and I think it is probably my biggest strength in the role.

Authors: With the increase of followers and engagement, how have you seen this evolution of people wanting to monetize part of your social media because of these numbers and this engagement?

Yole: It has changed a lot. In my first few months, we did not have too much talk out of sponsors to have things posted on the Brumbies social media platforms. The partnership department would tell me I have to put things in. For example, during the Rugby World Cup, I was asked to put a variety of things up. But now we have professional ways of getting videos to put on social media. We have Hart Sport [a sponsor], who suddenly saw that our social media is growing and getting a lot more following; so instead of taking their allocated tickets they get for being a sponsor, they said that they wanted to have social media content using their tickets as prizes to get more engagement into our channels. So the contest was, “if you tag us and take photos of yourself in your [Hart Sport] gear, you have a chance to win good tickets.” It has just grown. When I first started, there was Land Rover wanting content on our social media; now it is just growing and

growing and growing with new sponsors, and I think it is a big selling point for us to have such a good social media following and good content we push out.

Authors: You said you use Facebook and Twitter to post links to news articles on your website. Do you track how much traffic you get going to your website from the social media accounts and how do you direct users back to the Brumbies website?

Yole: We use Google analytics for that. I do check which articles are getting the most views. In terms of seeing how many people click from the posts, you can see how many people the post has reached through insights. So we look at that a lot as well. The website is also another spot we are looking to get more sponsors and ads on. We have started to attract sponsors to our social media pages; the website is another huge part of that market. We need to know which parts of the website are most viewed so we can target sponsors for different parts of the website, such as the squad page. So you would click on the squad link and see “the Brumbies squad is bought to you by xyz sponsor.” Our social media is constantly trying to drive traffic to different areas so we can sell those areas and have more digital assets as an organization. Digital assets are becoming more and more important.

Authors: Is there any part of your role you find to be particularly challenging?

Yole: My role is very challenging, where I work seven days a week during the season, and I do not have too much time away, even when I am on leave [on holiday or vacation]. For example, at Christmas you are meant to be on leave, but you have to be switched on. You cannot just put your phone down for a day. That is very challenging. Not being able to take an extended mental rest from the job. You always have to be switched on; you always have to be doing it. That is definitely the challenging part of the job. You are always working.

Authors: Tell us a bit about yourself and your background and what made you want to come to the Brumbies.

Yole: I am a recent graduate with a bachelor’s degree in sports media from the University of Canberra. As part of my internship unit, I successfully applied for an internship with the Brumbies. This involved match-day work and creating content for news articles and that sort of thing. In late September of 2015, I was at the Brumby Ball (end of season function), and the marketing and communications manager said there were two new roles opening up and that I should apply for them. So I applied for and got the job I am in now. I started two weeks later.

Authors: Going back to the internship you mentioned, if you were to talk to a group of students now, how would you describe the value of the internship to them?

Yole: It is the reason I am employed. If you do an internship in a field or a workplace that you want to work, and you do a good job and show everyone that you are capable of doing a good job, you put yourself out there. Not only in that organization, but you could use them as a reference. So the value of the internship was huge! The other thing that I did was organize my internship very early. We started the unit in February. I do not think anyone else had organized their internship already, but I had contacted the Brumbies in November of the year before saying I was interested in a midyear internship. We arranged a meeting in November, had the talk, and they said [they] would love to have [me] on board. I came back in February and was already doing things, and everyone else was just taking their time trying to find something. I think you need to be really proactive in finding those internships because they are great value—unbelievable, really.

Authors: Besides the internship, do you have any other tips or advice for students who might be looking to get into a similar role?

Yole: I kind of wish I did more writing when I was younger. I didn’t really do much. There is that need to do some regular writing; even if it does not get published anywhere, at least you have something to show someone—a portfolio of articles or something like that. For my role, it was important that I was active on social media and had used the platforms the Brumbies have. I knew the ins and outs of them, including the backend and the analytics. That is important; if I had showed up and they had asked about my social media usage, and I had told them I did not have social media, I do not think that would have worked well.



Bill Yole — Social media coordinator and webmaster of the ACT Brumbies Super Rugby franchise.